

My name is Jasmine Ayers and I am a junior at the Sound School in New Haven. When I joined the Sound School, I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life. But this school and its unique curriculum, namely the biotech concentration, led me to what started out as an interest but became a fascination and potentially my future career.

I had never thought about microbiology prior to this program. It's an obscure field of study, especially for one that so greatly impacts every human being alive on the planet. My first exposure was via reading a book, *The Hot Zone*, which I just happened to find in the library (I later became aware that this book was only present in the library because our biotech teacher had ordered several copies for a reading assignment he gave to his class.)

It was *The Hot Zone* that made me sign up for biotech, and I am indelibly grateful. What the book made a vague interest, the class made something I could actually see myself doing. Biotech class is so compelling to me because it includes a huge amount of hands on learning. The equipment the Sound School has, which is as far as I can see is unique to us among New Haven high schools, allowed my class to perform labs such as the genetic transformation of bacteria. We inserted jellyfish genes into *E. coli*, creating bacteria modified to fluoresce green. This and other experiences were fascinating and of course perpetuated my interest in the field. They also gave me lab skills, things like sterile technique, plating bacteria, pipetting, microscope use, and autoclave procedures, which are obviously attractive qualities in a prospective intern or employee in a microbiology lab. The skills I learned in this class are already working for me; I have found an internship in a Yale lab working on using modified viral proteins to increase cellular resistance to the HIV virus. I am unbelievably excited to spend a summer doing

what I love- and even more pleased to be doing work that could realistically have a big impact on medicine and maybe save lives before I even graduate high school.

I believe that giving students the opportunity to participate in biotech programs like the Sound School's is immensely important. Not only because I want everyone to be able to discover something they genuinely can't wait to join the workforce and start doing like I have, but also because society at large needs more people educated in and committed to this field. As I said before, microbiology and biotech in general are perplexingly obscure. Many, if not most kids don't even think of careers in this field as a viable option for them. But the need for us is only growing- mankind will always be plagued by infectious diseases that need vaccines, treatments and cures. Droughts, pests, and plain population growth will always cause famines, famines that can be prevented or at least reduced by engineering hardier, more efficient crops. The list goes on. Programs like the Sound School's offer amazing opportunities for the students enrolled in them, but they also provide opportunities and benefits for everyone else by bringing new minds into a field that will affect and can improve quality of life for everyone.

Please increase funding for biotech and other agriscience programs by adopting the ECS Task Force School Choice Funding recommendation into the Governor's Proposed Budget.

I greatly appreciate the opportunity to present this testimony to you and I hope you find it helpful during your budget discussion.